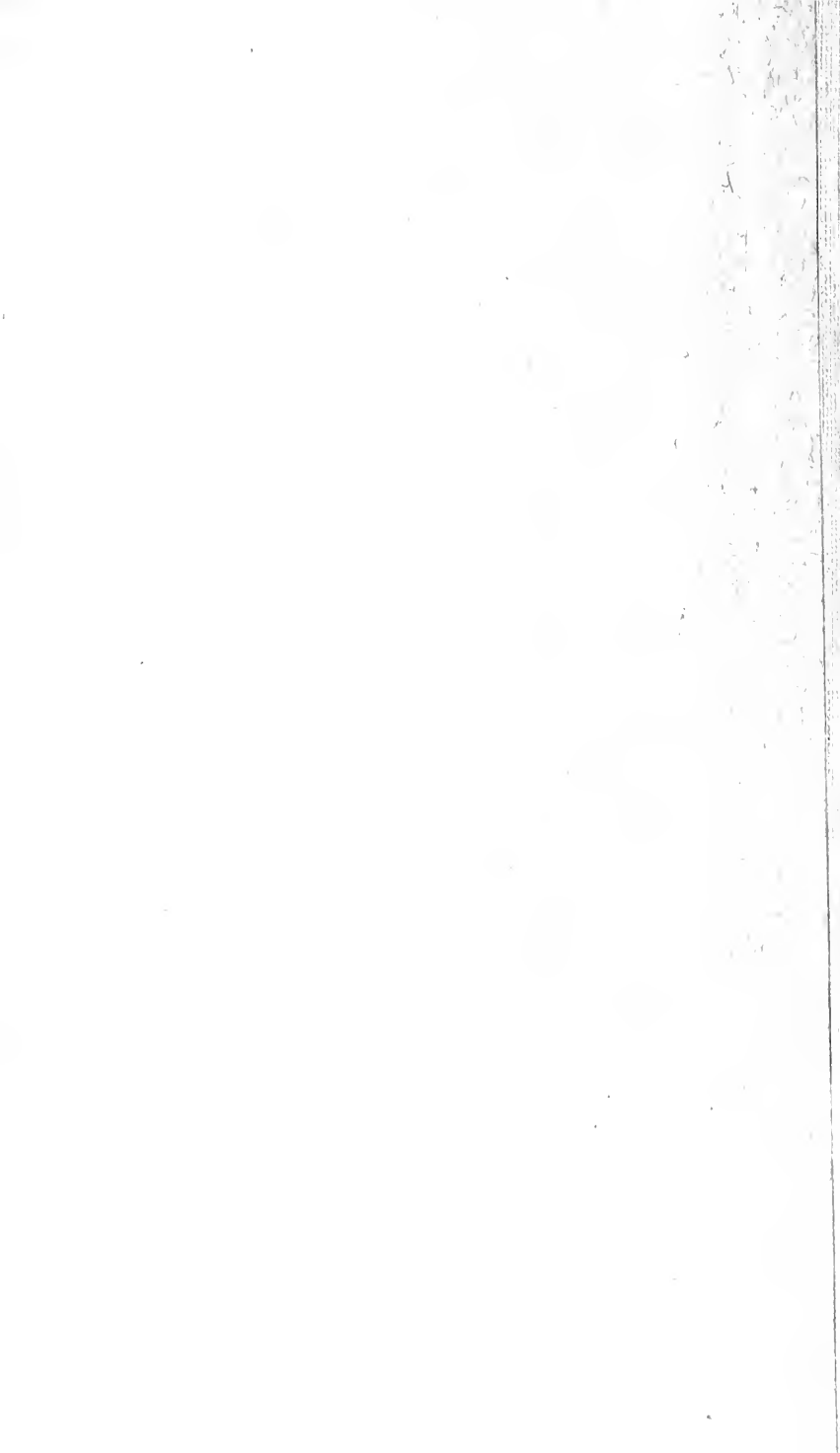


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MODERN INFIDELITY CONSIDERED

WITH RESPECT TO ITS

INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY :

IN A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE BAPTIST MEETING,

CAMBRIDGE.

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By ROBERT HALL, A. M.

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Professing themselves to be wise they became fools. ST. PAUL.

Sunt qui in fortunæ jam casibus omnia ponant,  
Et nullo credant mundum rectore moveri,  
Natura volvente vices et lucis, et anni ;  
*Atque ideo intrepidi quæcunque altaria tangunt.* JUV.

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FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE THIRD  
ENGLISH EDITION.

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## PREFACE.

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THE Author knows not whether it be necessary to apologize for the extraordinary length of this sermon, which so much exceeds the usual limits of public discourses; for it is only for the reader to conceive, (by a fiction of the imagination, if he pleases so to consider it) that the patience of his audience indulged him with their attention during its delivery. The fact is, not being in the habit of writing his sermons, this discourse was not committed to paper till after it was delivered; so that the phraseology may probably vary, and the bulk be somewhat extended; but the substance is certainly retained.

He must crave the indulgence of the religious public for having blended so little *theology* with it. He is fully aware, the chief attention of a christian minister should be occupied in explaining the doctrines, and enforcing the duties, of genuine christianity; nor is he chargeable, he hopes, in the exercise of his public functions, with any remarkable deviation from that rule of conduct; yet is he equally convinced, excursions into other topics are sometimes both lawful and necessary. The versatility of error demands a correspondent variety in the methods of defending truth: and from whom have the public more right to expect its defence, in opposition to the encroachments of error and infidelity, than from those who profess to devote their studies and their lives to the advancement of virtue and religion? Accordingly, a multitude of publications on these subjects, equally powerful in argument, and impressive in manner, have issued from divines of different persuasions, which must be allowed to have done the utmost honor to the clerical profession. The most luminous statements of the evidences of Christianity, on historical grounds, have been made; the petulant cavils of Infidels satisfactorily refuted; and their ignorance, if not put to shame, at least amply exposed; so that revelation, as far as truth and reason can prevail, is on all sides triumphant.

There is one point of view, however, in which the respective systems remain to be examined, which, though hitherto little considered, is forced upon our attention by the present conduct of our adversaries ; that is, their *Influence on Society*. The controversy appears to have taken a new turn. The advocates of Infidelity, baffled in the field of argument, though unwilling to relinquish the contest, have changed their mode of attack, and seem less disposed to impugn the authority than to supersede the use of Revealed Religion, by giving such representations of man and of society as are calculated to make its functions appear unreasonable and unnecessary. Their aim is not so much to discredit the pretensions of any particular religion, as to set aside the principles common to all.

To obliterate the sense of Deity, of moral functions, and a future world, and by these means to prepare the way for the total subversion of every institution, both social and religious, which men have been hitherto accustomed to revere, is evidently the principal object of modern Sceptics ; the first sophists who have avowed an attempt to govern the world without inculcating the persuasion of a superior power. It might well excite our surprise, to behold an effort to shake off the yoke of religion, which was totally unknown during the prevalence of gross superstition, reserved for a period of the world distinguished from every other by the possession of a Revelation more pure, perfect, and better authenticated, than the enlightened sages of antiquity ever ventured to anticipate, were we not fully persuaded the immaculate holiness of this Revelation is precisely that which renders it disgusting to men who are determined at all events to retain their vices. Our SAVIOUR furnishes the solution ; *they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil ; neither will they come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved.*

While all the religions, the Jewish excepted, which, previous to the promulgation of christianity, prevailed in the world, partly the contrivance of human policy, partly the offspring of ignorant fear, mixed with the mutilated remains of traditionary revelation, were favorable to the indulgence of some vices, and but feebly restrained the practice of others ; betwixt vice of every

fort and in every degree, and the religion of Jesus, there subsists an irreconcilable enmity, an eternal discord. The dominion of christianity being, in the very essence of it, the dominion of virtue, we need look no farther for the sources of hostility in any who oppose it, than their attachment to vice and disorder.

This view of the controversy, if it be just, demonstrates its supreme importance, and furnishes the strongest plea with every one with whom it is not a matter of indifference whether vice or virtue, delusion or truth, govern the world, to exert his talents in whatever proportion they are possessed, in *contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*. In such a crisis, is it not best for Christians of all denominations, that they may better concentrate their forces against the common adversary, to suspend, for the present, their internal disputes, imitating the policy of wise states, who have never failed to consider the invasion of an enemy as the signal for terminating the contests of party? Internal peace is the best fruit we can reap from external danger. The momentous contest at issue betwixt the christian church and infidels, may instruct us how trivial, for the most part, are the controversies of its members with each other, and that the different ceremonies, opinions and practices, by which they are distinguished, correspond to the variety of feature and complexion, discernible in the offspring of the same parent, among whom there subsists the greatest family likeness. May it please God so to dispose the minds of christians of every visible church and community, *that Ephraim no longer vexing Judah, nor Judah Ephraim*, the only rivalry felt in future may be, who shall most advance the interests of our common christianity, and the only provocation sustained, *that of provoking each other to love and good works!*—When, at the distance of more than half a century, christianity was assaulted, by a *Woolston*, a *Tindal*, and a *Morgan*, it was ably supported, both by clergymen of the established church, and writers among protestant dissenters; the labors of a *Clarke* and a *Butler*, were associated with those of a *Doddridge*, a *Leland*, and a *Lardner*, with such equal reputation and success, as to make it evident that the intrinsic excellence of religion needs not the aid of external appendages; but that, with or

without a dowry, her charms are of sufficient power to fix and engage the heart.

The writer of this discourse will feel himself happy, should his example stimulate any of his brethren, of superior abilities, to contribute their exertions in so good a cause. His apology for not entering more at large, into the proofs of the being of a God,\* and the evidences of Christianity,† is, that these subjects have been already handled with great ability by various writers, and that he wished rather to confine himself to one view of the subject, the total incompatibility of sceptical principles with the existence of society. Should his life be spared, he may probably, at some future time, enter into a fuller and more particular examination of the infidel philosophy, both with respect to its speculative principles, and its practical effects; its influence on society and on the individual. In the mean time, he humbly consecrates this discourse to the honor of that Saviour, who, when the means of a more liberal offering are wanting, commends the widow's mite.

*Cambridge, January 18, 1800.*

P. S. The author has availed himself of the opportunity afforded by a new impression, to correct some errors which had crept unawares into the first edition, as well as to make a few other alterations too trivial to be specified.

\* See an excellent sermon on atheism, by the Rev. Mr. *Eglin*, of *Bristol*, at whose meeting the substance of this discourse was first preached. In the sermon referred to, the argument for the existence of a Deity, is stated with the utmost clearness and precision, and the sophistry of *Dupuis*, a French infidel, refuted in a very satisfactory manner.

† It is almost superfluous to name a work so universally known as Dr. *Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity*, which is, probably, without exception, the most clear and satisfactory statement of the historical proofs of the christian religion, ever exhibited in any age or country.

A

# S E R M O N,

ON

EPHESIANS ii. 12.—*WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.*

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AS the christian ministry is established for the instruction of men, throughout every age, in truth and holiness, it must adapt itself to the ever shifting scenes of the moral world, and stand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, under whatever form they may appear. The church and the world form two societies so distinct, and governed by such opposite principles and maxims, that, as well from this contrariety as from the express warnings of scripture, true christians must look for a state of warfare, with this consoling assurance, that the church, like the burning bush beheld by Moses in the land of Midian, may be encompassed with flames, but will never be consumed.

When she was delivered from the persecuting power of Rome, she only experienced a change of trials. The oppression of external violence was followed by the more dangerous and insidious attacks of internal enemies. The freedom of inquiry claimed and asserted at the reformation, degenerated in the hands of men who professed the principles without possessing the spirit of the reformers, into a fondness for speculative refinements, and consequently into a source of dispute, faction, and heresy. While protestants attended more to the points on which they differed, than to those in which they agreed, while more zeal was employed in settling cere-

monies and defending subtleties, than in enforcing plain revealed truths, the lovely fruits of peace and charity perished under the storms of controversy.

In this disjointed and disordered state of the christian church, they who never looked into the interior of christianity, were apt to suspect, that to a subject so fruitful in particular disputes, must attach a general uncertainty, and that a religion founded on revelation, could never have occasioned such discordancy of principle and practice amongst its disciples. Thus infidelity is the joint offspring of an irreligious temper and unholy speculation, employed, not in examining the evidences of christianity, but in detecting the vices and imperfections of professing christians. It has passed through various stages, each distinguished by higher gradations of impiety ; for when men arrogantly abandon their guide, and wilfully shut their eyes on the light of heaven, it is wisely ordained that their errors shall multiply at every step, until their extravagance confutes itself, and the mischief of their principles works its own antidote. That such has been the progress of infidelity will be obvious from a slight survey of its history.

Lord *Herbert*, the first and purest of our English free thinkers, who flourished in the beginning of the reign of Charles the first, did not so much impugn the doctrine or the morality of the scriptures, as attempt to supersede their necessity, by endeavoring to shew, that the great principles of the unity of God, a moral government, and a future world, are taught with sufficient clearness by the light of nature. *Bolingbroke*, and others of his successors advanced much farther, and attempted to invalidate the proofs of the moral character of the Deity, and consequently all expectations of rewards and punishments, leaving the Supreme Being no other perfections than those which belong to a first cause or almighty contriver. After him, at a considerable distance, followed *Hume*, the most subtle, if not the most philosophical of the deists, who,

by perplexing the relations of cause and effect, boldly aimed to introduce an universal scepticism, and to pour a more than Egyptian darkness into the whole region of morals. Since his time, sceptical writers have sprung up in abundance, and infidelity has allured multitudes to its standard; the young and superficial by its dexterous sophistry, the vain by the literary fame of its champions, and the profligate by the licentiousness of its principles. Atheism, the most undisguised, has at length begun to make its appearance.

Animated by numbers and emboldened by success, the infidels of the present day have given a new direction to their efforts, and impressed a new character on the ever growing mass of their impious speculations.

By uniting more closely with each other, by giving a sprinkling of irreligion to all their literary productions, they aim to engross the formation of the public mind, and, amidst the warmest professions of attachment to virtue, to effect an entire disruption of morality from religion. Pretending to be the teachers of virtue and the guides of life, they propose to revolutionize the morals of mankind, to regenerate the world by a process entirely new, and to rear the temple of virtue, not merely without the aid of religion, but on the renunciation of its principles and the derision of its sanctions. Their party has derived a great accession of numbers and strength, from events the most momentous and astonishing in the political world, which have divided the sentiments of Europe betwixt hope and terror, and, however they may issue, have, for the present, swelled the ranks of infidelity. So rapidly, indeed, has it advanced since this crisis, that a great majority on the continent, and in England a considerable proportion, of those who pursue literature as a profession,\* may justly be considered as the open or disguised abettors of atheism.

\* By those who pursue literature as a profession, the Author would be understood to mean that numerous class of literary men, who draw their principal subsistence from their writings.

With respect to the sceptical and religious systems, the inquiry at present is not so much which is the truest in speculation, as which is the most useful in practice ; or in other words, whether morality will be best promoted, by considering it as part of a great and comprehensive law, emanating from the will of a supreme, omnipotent Legislator ; or as a mere expedient adapted to our present situation, enforced by no other motives than those which arise from the prospects and interests of the present state. The *absurdity* of atheism having been demonstrated so often and so clearly by many eminent men, that this part of the subject is exhausted, I should hasten immediately to what I have more particularly in view, were I not apprehensive a discourse of this kind may be expected to contain some statement of the argument in proof of a Deity, which, therefore, I shall present in as few and plain words as possible.

When we examine a watch, or any other piece of machinery, we instantly perceive marks of design. The arrangement of its several parts and the adaption of its movements to one result, shew it to be a contrivance ; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itself, but in a separate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vast magazine of contrivances, we see innumerable objects replete with the most exquisite design. The human eye, for example, is formed, with admirable skill for the purpose of sight ; the ear for the function of hearing. As in the productions of art, we never think of ascribing the power of contrivance to the machine itself, so we are certain the skill displayed in the human structure, is not a property of man, since he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inseparable relation betwixt the ideas of a contrivance and a contriver, and it be evident in regard to the human structure the designing agent is not man himself, there must undeniably be some separate invisible



Being who is his former. This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.

This reasoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be said, may we not suppose the world has always continued as it is ; that is, that there has been a constant succession of finite beings, appearing and disappearing on the earth from all eternity ? I answer, whatever is supposed to have occasioned this constant succession, exclusive of an intelligent cause, will never account for the undeniable marks of design, visible in all finite beings ; nor is the absurdity of supposing a contrivance without a contriver diminished by this imaginary succession, but rather increased by being repeated at every step of the series.

Besides, an eternal succession of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is, therefore, plainly impossible. As the supposition is made to get quit of the idea of any one having existed from eternity, each of the beings in the succession must have begun in time ; but the succession itself is eternal. We have then, a succession of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the succession ; or, in other words, a series of beings running on *ad infinitum*, before it reached any particular beginning ; which is absurd.

From these considerations, it is manifest there must be some eternal being, or nothing could ever have existed ; and since the beings which we behold, bear in their whole structure evident marks of wisdom and design, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wise and intelligent Agent.

To prove the unity of this great Being, in opposition to a plurality of gods, it is not necessary to have recourse to metaphysical abstractions : it is sufficient to observe that the notion of more than one Author of nature is inconsistent with that harmony of design which pervades her works, that it solves no appearances, is supported by no evidence, and serves no purpose but to embarrass and perplex our conceptions.

Such are the proofs of the existence of that great and glorious Being whom we denominate God : and it is not presumption to say, it is impossible to find another truth in the whole compass of morals, which according to the justest laws of reasoning, admits of such strict and rigorous demonstration.

But I proceed to the more immediate object of this discourse, which, as has been already intimated, is not so much to evince the falsehood of scepticism as a theory, as to display its mischievous effects, contrasted with those which result from the belief of a Deity and a future state. The subject viewed in this light, may be considered under two aspects ; the influence of the opposite systems on the principle of morals, and on the formation of character ; the first may be stiled their direct, the latter, their equally important, but indirect consequence and tendency.

I. The sceptical or irreligious system subverts the whole foundation of morals. It may be affirmed as a maxim, that no person can be required to act contrary to his greatest good, or his highest interest, comprehensively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to forego our own interest *partially* ; to sacrifice a smaller pleasure for the sake of a greater ; to incur a present evil in pursuit of a distant good of more consequence ; in a word, to arbitrate, amongst interfering claims of inclination, is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to risque the happiness of the whole duration of our being in any case whatever, admitting it to be possible, would be foolish, because the sacrifice must, by the nature of it, be so great as to preclude the possibility of compensation.

As the present world upon sceptical principles, is the only place of recompence, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promise the greatest sum of present good, cases which often occur in reality, and much oftener in appearance, every motive to virtuous conduct is superseded, a deviation from

rectitude becomes the part of wisdom; and should the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obstructed by disgrace, torment or death, to persevere would be madness and folly, and a violation of the first and most essential law of nature. Virtue on these principles, being in numberless instances, at war with self preservation, never can or ought to become a fixed habit on the mind.

The system of infidelity is not only incapable of arming virtue for great and trying occasions; but leaves it unsupported in the most ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral sense, to benevolence and sympathy; in vain will they expatiate on the tranquillity and pleasure attendant on a virtuous course; for it is undeniable that these impulses may be overcome, and though you may remind the offender, that in disregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct consistent with them is productive of much internal satisfaction; yet, if he reply that his taste is of a different sort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man must choose his own pleasures, the argument is at an end.

Rewards and punishments awarded by Omnipotent Power, afford a palpable and pressing motive, which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature; but tastes and relishes are not to be prescribed.

A motive in which the reason of man shall acquiesce, enforcing the practice of virtue, at all times and seasons, enters into the very essence of moral obligation; modern infidelity supplies no such motive; it is, therefore, essentially and infallibly a system of enervation, turpitude and vice.

This chasm in the construction of morals, can only be supplied by the firm belief of a rewarding and avenging Deity, who binds duty and happiness, though they may seem distant, in an indissoluble chain, without which, whatever usurps the name of virtue, is not a principle, but a feeling, not a determinate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the tastes of individuals, and changing with the scenes of life.

Nor is this the only way in which infidelity subverts the foundation of morals. All reasoning on morals, pre-supposes a distinction betwixt inclinations and duties, affections and rules : the former prompt, the latter prescribe ; the former supply motives to action, the latter regulate and control it. Hence, it is evident, if virtue has any just claim to authority, it must be under the latter of these notions, that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and supreme.

But without the intervention of a superior will, it is impossible there should be any moral laws, except in the lax, metaphorical sense, in which we speak of the laws of matter and motion : men being essentially equal, morality is, on these principles, only a stipulation or silent compact, into which every man is supposed to enter, as far as suits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal and his judge.

Two consequences, the most disastrous to society, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this system ; the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total absence of great virtues.

1. In those conjunctures which tempt avarice or inflame ambition, when a crime flatters with the prospect of impunity, and the certainty of immense advantage, what is to restrain an atheist from its commission ? To say that remorse will deter him, is absurd ; for remorse as distinguished from pity, is the sole offspring of religious belief, the extinction of which is the great purpose of the infidel philosophy.

The dread of punishment or infamy from his fellow creatures, will be an equally ineffectual barrier, because crimes are only committed under such circumstances as suggest the hope of concealment ; not to say that crimes themselves will soon lose

their infamy and their horror, under the influence of that system which destroys the sanctity of virtue, by converting it into a low calculation of worldly interest. Here the sense of an ever present Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the most awful and indispensible necessity, as it is that alone which impresses on all crimes the character of folly, shews that duty and interest in every instance coincide, and that the most prosperous career of vice, the most brilliant successes of criminality, are but an *accumulation of wrath, against the day of wrath.*

As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable consequence of the diffusion of sceptical principles, so to understand this consequence in its full extent, we must look beyond their immediate effects, and consider the disruption of social ties, the destruction of confidence, the terror, suspicion and hatred, which must prevail in that state of society in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquillity which pervades a well ordered community, and the mutual good offices which bind its members together, is founded on the implied confidence in the indisposition to annoy, in the justice, humanity and moderation of those among whom we dwell ; so that the worst consequence of crimes is, that they impair the stock of public charity and general tenderness. The dread and hatred of our species would infallibly be grafted on a conviction that we were exposed, every moment to the furies of an unbridled ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magistrate stood between us and the daggers of assassins. In such a state, laws deriving no support from public manners, are unequal to the task of curbing the fury of the passions, which from being concentrated into selfishness, fear and revenge, acquire new force ; terror and suspicion beget cruelty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention ; pity is extinguished in the stronger impulse of self preservation ; the tender and generous affections are crushed, and nothing is seen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce

and unmitigated struggle for superiority. This is but a faint sketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we must expect, should we be so unfortunate as ever to witness the triumph of modern infidelity.

2. This system is a foil as barren of great and sublime virtues, as it is prolific in crimes. By great and sublime virtues are meant, those which are called into action on great and trying occasions, which demand the sacrifice of the dearest interests and prospects of human life, and sometimes of life itself; the virtues, in a word, which by their rarity and splendor draw admiration, and have rendered illustrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confessors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of existence within the present life, must tend, in a proportionable degree, to diminish the grandeur and narrow the sphere of human agency.

As well might you expect exalted sentiments of justice from a professed gamester, as look for noble principles in the man whose hopes and fears are all suspended on the present moment, and who stakes the whole happiness of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he is ever impelled to the performance of great achievements in a good cause, it must be solely by the hope of fame; a motive which, besides that it makes virtue the servant of opinion, usually grows weaker at the approach of death, and which, however it may surmount the love of existence, in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public observation, can seldom be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private station.

In affirming that infidelity is unfavorable to the higher class of virtues we are supported as well by facts, as by reasoning. We should be sorry to load our adversaries with unmerited reproach; but to what history, to what record, will they appeal, for the traits of moral greatness, exhibited by

their disciples? Where shall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity, or atheistical virtue? Not that we mean to accuse them of inactivity: they have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits; exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperishable memory and disastrous lustre.

Though it is confessed great and splendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but must, from their nature, be reserved for high and eminent occasions, yet, that system is essentially defective which leaves no room for their cultivation. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often save and always illustrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raise the standard of morals; they arrest the progress of degeneracy; they diffuse a lustre over the path of life: monuments of the greatness of the human soul, they present to the world the august image of virtue in her sublimest form, from which streams of light and glory issue to remote times and ages: while their commemoration, by the pen of historians and poets, awakens in distant bosoms the sparks of kindred excellence.

Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds, with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of society, which completes the degradation of the species; the frightful contrast of dwarfish virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing good is mean and little, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant; a dead and sickening uniformity prevails, broken only at intervals by volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

II. Hitherto we have considered the influence of scepticism on the principles of virtue; and have endeavored to shew that it despoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the dust: its influence on the formation of character remains to

be examined. The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their interest : their conduct takes its color more from their acquired taste, inclinations, and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greatest good. It is only on great occasions the mind awakes, to take an extended survey of her whole course, and that she suffers the dictates of reason to impress a new bias upon her movements ; the actions of each day, are for the most part, links which follow each other in the chain of custom. Hence the great effort of practical wisdom is to imbue the mind with right tastes, affections and habits ; the elements of character, and masters of action.

The exclusion of a supreme Being and of a superintending Providence, tends directly to the destruction of moral taste. It robs the universe of all finished and consummate excellence, even in idea. The admiration of perfect wisdom and goodness, for which we are formed, and which kindles such unspeakable rapture in the soul, finding in the regions of scepticism nothing to which it corresponds, droops and languishes. In a world which presents a fair spectacle of order and beauty, of a vast family nourished and supported by an almighty Parent, in a world which leads the devout mind step by step, to the contemplation of the first fair and the first good, the sceptic is encompassed with nothing but obscurity, meanness and disorder.

When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we must be convinced that such an idea, intimately present to the mind, must have a most powerful effect in refining the moral taste. Composed of the richest elements, it embraces, in the character of a beneficent Parent, and almighty Ruler, whatever is venerable in wisdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodness.

Human excellence is blended with many imperfections, and seen under many limitations ; it is beheld only in detached



and separate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire ; so that, when, in imitation of the stoics, we wish to form out of these fragments the notion of a perfectly wise and good man, we know it is a mere fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is embodied and realized. In the belief of a Deity these conceptions are reduced to reality : the scattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentrated, and become the real attributes of that Being with whom we stand in the nearest relation, who sits supreme at the head of the universe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his presence.

The efficacy of these sentiments in producing and augmenting a virtuous taste, will indeed be proportioned to the vividness with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur ; yet some benefit will not fail to result from them, even in their lowest degree.

The idea of the supreme Being, has this peculiar property, that as it admits of no substitute, so from the first moment it is impressed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himself is immutable ; but our conception of his character is continually receiving fresh accessions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having transferred upon it new perceptions of beauty and goodness, by attracting to itself, as a centre, whatever bears the impress of dignity, order or happiness. It borrows splendor from all that is fair, subordinates to itself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe.

As the object of worship will always be the object of imitation, hence arises a fixed standard of moral excellence, by the contemplation of which, the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature rises above its natural level.

When the knowledge of God was lost in the world, just ideas of virtue and moral obligation disappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwise accounted for, that in the polished nations, and in the enlightened times of pagan antiquity, the most unnatural lusts and detestable impurities were not only tolerated in private life,\* but entered into religion, and formed a material part of public worship; † while among the Jews, a people so much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the same vices were regarded with horror?

The reason is this; the true character of God was unknown to the former, which, by the light of divine revelation, was imparted to the latter. The former cast their deities in the mould of their own imaginations, in consequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worshippers: to the latter, no scope was left for the wanderings of fancy, but a pure and perfect model was prescribed.

False and corrupt, however, as was the religion of the pagans (if it deserve the name) and defective, and often vicious, as was the character of their imaginary deities, it was still better for the world, for the void of knowledge to be filled with these, than abandoned to a total scepticism; for if both systems are equally false, they are not equally pernicious. When the fictions of heathenism consecrated the memory of its le-

\* It is worthy of observation, that the elegant and philosophic *Xenophon*, in delineating the model of a perfect Prince in the character of Cyrus, introduces a Mede who had formed an unnatural passion for his hero, and relates the incident in a lively, festive humor, without being in the least conscious of any indelicacy attached to it. What must be the state of manners in a country where a circumstance of this kind, feigned, no doubt, by way of ornament, finds a place in such a work? *Cyri Instit. Lib. 1.*

Deinde nobis qui concedentibus philosophis antiquis, adolescentulis delectamur etiam vitia sæpe jucunda sunt. *Cicero De Nat. Dei. Lib. 1.*

† — Nam quo non proflat femina templo. *Juv.*

The impurities practised in the worship of Isis, an Egyptian deity, rose to such a height, in the reign of *Tiberius*, that that profligate prince thought fit to prohibit her worship, and at the same time inflicted on her priests the punishment of crucifixion. *Jos. Antiquit. Judaic. L. 18.*

gillators and heroes, it invested them for the most part with those qualities which were in the greatest repute. They were supposed to possess in the highest degree the virtues in which it was most honorable to excel, and to be the witnesses, approvers and patrons of those perfections in others, by which their own character was chiefly distinguished. Men saw, or rather fancied they saw, in these supposed deities, the qualities they most admired dilated to a larger size, moving in a higher sphere, and associated with the power, dignity and happiness of superior natures. With such ideal models before them, and conceiving themselves continually acting under the eye of such spectators and judges, they felt a real elevation : their eloquence became more impassioned, their patriotism inflamed, and their courage exalted.

Revelation, by displaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect standard of virtue ; heathenism, one in many respects defective and vicious ; the fashionable scepticism of the present day, which excludes the belief of all superior powers, affords no standard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itself. All above and around it being shrouded in darkness, and the prospect confined to the tame realities of life, virtue has no room upwards to expand, nor are any excursions permitted into that unseen world, the true element of the great and good, by which it is fortified with motives equally calculated to satisfy the reason, to delight the fancy, and to impress the heart.

Modern infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taste ; it also promotes the growth of those vices which are the most hostile to social happiness. Of all the vices incident to human nature, the most destructive to society are vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality ; and these are precisely the vices which infidelity is calculated to cherish.

That the love, fear, and habitual contemplation of a Being infinitely exalted, or in other words, devotion, is adapted to

promote a sober and moderate estimate of our own excellencies, is incontestible ; nor is it less evident, that the exclusion of such sentiments must be favorable to pride. The criminality of pride will, perhaps, be less readily admitted ; for though there is no vice so opposite to the spirit of Christianity, yet there is none which, even in the Christian world, has, under various pretences, been treated with so much indulgence.

There is, it will be confessed, a delicate sensibility to character, a sober desire of reputation, a wish to possess the esteem of the wise and good, felt by the purest minds, and which is at the farthest remove from arrogance or vanity. The humility of a noble mind scarcely dares to approve of itself, until it has secured the approbation of others. Very different is that restless desire of distinction, that passion for theatrical display, which inflames the heart and occupies the whole attention of vain men. This, of all the passions, is the most unsocial, avarice itself not excepted. The reason is plain. Property is a kind of good, which may be more easily attained, and is capable of more minute sub-divisions, than fame. In the pursuit of wealth, men are led by an attention to their own interest to promote the welfare of each other ; their advantages are reciprocal ; the benefits which each is anxious to acquire for himself, he reaps in the greatest abundance from the union and conjunction of society. The pursuits of vanity are quite contrary. The portion of time and attention mankind are willing to spare from their avocations and pleasures, to devote to the admiration of each other is so small, that every successful adventurer is felt to have impaired the common stock. The success of one is the disappointment of multitudes. For though there be many rich, many virtuous, many wise men, fame must necessarily be the portion of but few. Hence every vain man, every man in whom vanity is the ruling passion, regarding his rival as his enemy, is strongly tempted to rejoice in his miscarriage and repine at his success.

Besides, as the passions are seldom seen in a simple, unmixed state, so vanity, when it succeeds, degenerates into arrogance ; when it is disappointed (and it is often disappointed) it is exasperated into malignity and corrupted into envy. In this stage the vain man commences a determined misanthropist. He detests that excellence which he cannot reach. He detests his species, and longs to be revenged for the unpardonable injustice he has sustained in their insensibility to his merits. He lives upon the calamities of the world ; the vices and miseries of men are his element and his food. Virtue, talents, and genius are his natural enemies, which he persecutes with instinctive eagerness, and unrelenting hostility. There are who doubt the existence of such a disposition ; but it certainly issues out of the dregs of disappointed vanity : a disease which taints and vitiates the whole character where ever it prevails. It forms the heart to such a profound indifference to the welfare of others, that whatever appearances he may assume, or however wide the circle of his seeming virtues may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man is his own centre. Attentive only to himself, absorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, instead of feeling tenderness for his fellow creatures as members of the same family, as beings with whom he is appointed to act, to suffer, and to sympathize ; he considers life as a stage on which he is performing a part, and mankind in no other light than spectators. Whether he smiles or frowns, whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence or his steps are died in blood, an attention to self is the spring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred.

His apparent good qualities lose all their worth, by losing all that is simple, genuine and natural : they are even pressed into the service of vanity, and become the means of enlarging its power. The truly good man is jealous over himself, lest the notoriety of his best actions by blending itself with

their motive, should diminish their value ; the vain man performs the same actions for the sake of that notoriety. The good man quietly discharges his duty and shuns ostentation ; the vain man considers every good deed lost that is not publicly displayed. The one is intent upon realities, the other upon semblances : the one aims to *be* virtuous, the other to *appear* so.

Nor is a mind inflated with vanity more disqualified for right action than just speculation ; or better disposed to the pursuit of truth than the practice of virtue. To such a mind the simplicity of truth is disgusting. Careless of the improvement of mankind, and intent only upon astonishing with the appearance of novelty, the glare of paradox will be preferred to the light of truth ; opinions will be embraced, not because they are just, but because they are new : the more flagitious, the more subversive of morals, the more alarming to the wise and good, the more welcome to men who estimate their literary powers by the mischief they produce, and who consider the anxiety and terror they impress as the measure of their renown. Truth is simple and uniform, while error may be infinitely varied ; and as it is one thing to start paradoxes, and another to make discoveries, we need the less wonder at the prodigious increase of modern philosophers.

We have been so much accustomed to consider extravagant self estimation merely as a *ridiculous* quality, that many will be surprised to find it treated as a vice, pregnant with serious mischief to society. But, to form a judgment of its influence upon the manners and happiness of a nation, it is necessary only to look at its effects in a family ; for bodies of men are only collections of individuals, and the greatest nation is nothing more than an aggregate of a number of families. Conceive of a domestic circle, in which each member is elated with a most extravagant opinion of himself, and a proportionable contempt of every other, is full of little contrivances

to catch applause, and whenever he is not praised is fullen and disappointed; what a picture of disunion, disgust, and animosity would such a family present; how utterly would domestic affection be extinguished, and all the purposes of domestic society be defeated! The general prevalence of such dispositions must be accompanied by an equal proportion of general misery. The tendency of pride to produce strife and hatred, is sufficiently apparent from the pains men have been at to construct a system of politeness, which is nothing more than a sort of mimic humility, in which the sentiments of an offensive self estimation are so far disguised and suppressed, as to make them compatible with the spirit of society; such a mode of behavior as would naturally result from an attention to the apostolic injunction: *Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory: but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.* But if the semblance is of such importance, how much more useful the reality: if the mere garb of humility is of such indispensable necessity, that without it society could not subsist, how much better still would the harmony of the world be preserved, were the condescension, deference, and respect, so studiously displayed, a true picture of the heart?

The same restless and eager vanity which disturbs a family, when it is permitted in a great national crisis to mingle with political affairs, distracts a kingdom; infusing into those entrusted with the enactment of laws, a spirit of rash innovation and daring empiricism, a disdain of the established usages of mankind, a foolish desire to dazzle the world with new and untried systems of policy, in which the precedents of antiquity and the experience of ages are only consulted to be trodden under foot; and into the executive department of government, a fierce contention for pre-eminence, an incessant

struggle to supplant and destroy, with a propensity to calumny and suspicion, proscription, and massacre.

We shall suffer the most eventful season ever witnessed in the affairs of men to pass over our heads to very little purpose, if we fail to learn from it some awful lessons on the nature and progress of the passions. The true light in which the French revolution ought to be contemplated, is that of a grand experiment on human nature. Among the various passions which that revolution has so strikingly displayed, none is more conspicuous than vanity; or is it difficult, without adverting to the national character of the people, to account for its extraordinary predominance. Political power, the most seducing object of ambition, never before circulated through so many hands; the prospect of possessing it was never before presented to so many minds. Multitudes, who by their birth and education, and not unfrequently by their talents, seemed destined to perpetual obscurity, were, by the alternate rise and fall of parties, elevated into distinction, and shared in the functions of government. The short lived forms of power and office glided with such rapidity through successive ranks of degradation, from the court to the very dregs of the populace, that they seemed rather to solicit acceptance, than to be a prize contended for, \* yet, as it was still impossible for all to possess authority, though none were willing to obey, a general impatience to break the ranks and rush into the foremost ground, maddened and infuriated the nation, and overwhelmed law, order, and civilization, with the violence of a torrent.

If such be the mischiefs both in public and private life resulting from an excessive self estimation, it remains next to be considered whether Providence has supplied any medicine to correct it; for as the reflection on excellencies, whether

\* ——— *Æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas  
Regumque turres.* HOR.



real or imaginary, is always attended with pleasure to the possessor, it is a disease deeply seated in our nature.

Suppose there were a great and glorious Being always present with us, who had given us existence with numberless other blessings, and on whom we depended each instant, as well for every present enjoyment as for every future good ; suppose again, we had incurred the just displeasure of such a Being, by ingratitude and disobedience, yet that in great mercy he had not cast us off, but had assured us he was willing to pardon and restore us, on our humble entreaty and sincere repentance : say, would not an habitual sense of the presence of this Being, self reproach for having displeased him, and an anxiety to recover his favor, be the most effectual antidote to pride? But such are the leading discoveries made by the christian revelation, and such the dispositions which a practical belief of it inspires.

Humility is the first fruit of religion. In the mouth of our Lord there is no maxim so frequent as the following, *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humblyeth himself shall be exalted.* Religion, and that alone, teaches absolute humility, by which I mean, a sense of our absolute nothingness, in the view of infinite greatness and excellence. That sense of inferiority, which results from the comparison of men with each other, is often an unwelcome sentiment forced upon the mind, which may rather embitter the temper than soften it : that which devotion impresses, is soothing and delightful. The devout man loves to lie low at the footstool of the Creator, because it is then he attains the most lively perceptions of the divine excellence, and the most tranquil confidence in the divine favor. In so august a presence he sees all distinctions lost, and all beings reduced to the same level ; he looks at his superiors without envy, and his inferiors without contempt ; and when from this elevation he descends to mix in society, the conviction of superiority which must in

many instances be felt, is a calm inference of the understanding, and no longer a busy, importunate passion of the heart.

*The wicked says the Psalmist, through the pride of their countenance, will not seek after God : God is not in all their thoughts.* When we consider the incredible vanity of the atheistical sect, together with the settled malignity, and unrelenting rancor with which they pursue every vestige of religion ; is it uncandid to suppose, that its humbling tendency is one principle cause of their enmity ; that they are eager to displace a Deity from the minds of men, that they may occupy the void ; to crumble the throne of the Eternal into dust, that they may elevate themselves on its ruins ; and that, as their licentiousness is impatient of restraint, so their pride disdains a superior ?

We mentioned a ferocity of character, as one effect of sceptical impiety. It is an inconvenience attending a controversy with those with whom we have so few principles in common, that we are often in danger of reasoning inconclusively, for the want of its being clearly known and settled what our opponents admit and what they deny. The persons, for example, with whom we are at present engaged, have discarded humility and modesty from the catalogue of virtues ; on which account we have employed the more time in evincing their importance ; but whatever may be thought of humility as a *virtue*, it surely will not be denied that inhumanity is a most detestable *vice* ; a vice however, which scepticism has a most powerful tendency to inflame.

As we have already shewn that pride hardens the heart, and that religion is the only effectual antidote, the connection between irreligion and inhumanity is, in this view, obvious. But there is another light in which this part of the subject may be viewed, in my humble opinion, much more important though seldom adverted to. The supposition that man is a moral and accountable being, destined to survive the

stroke of death, and to live in a future world in a never ending state of happiness or misery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *consequence*, than the opposite supposition. When we consider him as placed here by an almighty Ruler, in a state of probation, and that the present life is his period of trial, the first link in a vast and interminable chain which stretches into eternity, he assumes a dignified character in our eyes. Every thing which relates to him becomes interesting; and to trifle with his happiness is felt to be the most unpardonable levity. If such be the destination of man, it is evident, that in the qualities which fit him for it, his principal dignity consists: his moral greatness is his true greatness. Let the sceptical principles be admitted which represent him, on the contrary, as the offspring of chance, connected with no superior power, and sinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature, whose existence and happiness are insignificant. The characteristic difference is lost betwix him and the brute creation, from which he is no longer distinguished, except by the vividness and multiplicity of his perceptions.

If we reflect on that part of our nature which disposes us to humanity, we shall find that, where we have no particular attachment, our sympathy with the sufferings, and concern for the destruction of sensitive beings, is in proportion to their supposed importance in the general scale; or, in other words, to their supposed capacity of enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witnessing the destruction of a man than of an inferior animal, because we consider it as involving the extinction of a much greater sum of happiness. For the same reason, he who would shudder at the slaughter of a large animal, will see a thousand insects perish without a pang. Our sympathy with the calamities of our fellow creatures is adjusted to the same proportions: for we feel more powerfully affected with the distresses of fallen greatness, than with

equal or greater distresses sustained by persons of inferior rank ; because, having been accustomed to associate with an elevated station the idea of superior happiness, the loss appears the greater, and the wreck more extensive. But the disproportion in importance, betwixt man and the meanest insect is not so great, as that which subsists betwixt man considered as *mortal* and as *immortal* ; that is, betwixt man as he is represented by the system of scepticism, and that of divine revelation : for the enjoyment of the meanest insect bears some proportion, though a very small one, to the present happiness of man ; but the happiness of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The sceptical system, therefore, sinks the importance of human existence to an inconceivable degree.

From these principles results the following important inference, that, to extinguish human life by the hand of violence, must be quite a different thing in the eyes of a sceptic from what it is in those of a christian. With the sceptic it is nothing more than diverting the course of a little red fluid called blood ; it is merely lessening the number by one of many millions of fugitive contemptible creatures : the christian sees, in the same event, an accountable being cut off from a state of probation, and hurried, perhaps unprepared, into the presence of his Judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable sentence, which is to fix him for ever in an unalterable condition of felicity or woe. The former perceives in death nothing but its physical circumstances ; the latter is impressed with the magnitude of its moral consequences. It is the moral relation which man is supposed to bear to a superior power, the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his present dispositions and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal destiny more than any superiority of intellectual powers, abstracted from these considerations, which invest him with such mysterious grandeur,

and constitute the firmest guard on the sanctuary of human life. This reasoning, it is true, serves more *immediately* to shew how the disbelief of a future state endangers the security of life ; but though this be its *direct* consequence, it extends by analogy much farther : since he, who has learned to sport with the *lives* of his fellow creatures, will feel but little solicitude for their welfare in any other instance ; but, as the greater includes the less, will easily pass from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not seen till the moment of attack, so in that tranquil state of society, in which law and order maintain their ascendancy, it is not perceived, perhaps not even suspected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern infidelity leave us naked and defenceless. But, let the state be convulsed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the still small voice of law drowned in the tempest of popular fury, (events which recent experience shews to be possible) it will then be seen that atheism is a school of ferocity ; and that, having taught its disciples to consider mankind as little better than a nest of insects, they will be prepared, in the fierce conflicts of party, to trample upon them without pity, and extinguish them without remorse.

It was late\* before the atheism of Epicurus gained footing at Rome, but its prevalence was soon followed by such scenes of proscription, confiscation, and blood, as were *then* unparalleled in the history of the world ; from which the republic being never able to recover itself, after many unsuccessful struggles, exchanged liberty for repose, by submission to absolute power. Such were the effects of atheism at Rome. An attempt has been recently made to establish a similar system in France, the consequences of which are too well known,

\* Neque enim assentior iis qui *hæc nuper* differare cœperunt cum corporibus simul animos interire atque omnia morte deleri. *Cicero de Amicitia.*

to render it requisite for me to shock your feelings by a recital. The only doubt that can arise is, whether the barbarities which have stained the revolution in that unhappy country are justly chargeable on the prevalence of atheism. Let those, who doubt of this, recollect that the men, who, by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change; *Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot, Rousseau*, and others, were avowed enemies of revelation; that, in all their writings, the diffusion of scepticism and of revolutionary principles went hand in hand; that the fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially pointed against the christian priesthood\* and religious institutions, without once

\* The Author finds he has given great offence to some friends whom he highly esteems, by applying the term *Christian priesthood* to the popish clergy. He begs leave to make a remark or two by way of apology.

1. It is admitted by all candid protestants, that salvation is attainable in the Roman catholic church; but he should be glad to be informed what part of the Christian covenant entitles us to expect the salvation of those (where the gospel is promulgated) who are not even a branch of the visible church of Christ. The papistical tenets are either *fundamentally* erroneous, on which supposition it is certain no papist can be saved, or their errors must be consistent with Christian faith, and consequently cannot be a valid reason for excluding those who maintain them from being a part (a most corrupt part, if you please, but still a part) of the christian church.

2. The popish clergy were persecuted under the *character of christians*, not under the notion of heretics or schismatics. They, who were the subjects of persecution, were certainly the best judges of its aim and direction: and when the archbishop of Paris, and others, endeavored to severn themselves from its effects by a recantation, what did they recant? Was it popery? no; but the profession of christianity. These apostates, doubtless, meant to remove the ground of offence, which, in their opinion, was the christian profession. If the foundest ecclesiastical historians have not refused the honors of martyrdom to such as suffered in the cause of truth amongst the Gnostics, it ill becomes the liberality of the present age to contemplate, with sullen indifference, or malicious joy, the sufferings of conscientious catholics.

3. At the period to which the author refers, christian worship, of *every kind*, was prohibited, while, in solemn mockery of religion, adoration was paid to a trumpet, under the title of the goddess of reason. Is it necessary to prove that men, who were thus abandoned, must be hostile to true religion, under every form? or, if there be any gradations in their abhorrence, to that most which is the most pure and perfect? Are atheism and obscenity more congenial to the protestant than to the popish profession? To have incurred the hatred of the ruling party of France at the season alluded to, is an honor which the author would be sorry to resign, as the exclusive boast of the church of Rome: to have been the object of the partiality of such bloody and inhuman monsters, would have been a stain upon protestants which the virtue of *eyes* could not obliterate.

pretending like other persecutors to execute the vengeance of God (whose name they never mentioned) upon his enemies ; that their atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment ; that the reign of atheism was avowedly and expressly the reign of terror ; that in the full madness of their career, in the highest climax of their horrors, they shut up the temples of God, abolished his worship, and proclaimed death to be an eternal sleep ; as if, by pointing to the silence of the sepulchre, and the sleep of the dead, these ferocious barbarians meant to apologize for leaving neither sleep, quiet, nor repose to the living.

As the heathens fabled that Minerva issued full armed from the head of Jupiter ; so no sooner were the speculations of atheistical philosophy matured, than they gave birth to a ferocity which converted the most polished people in Europe into a horde of assassins ; the seat of voluptuous refinement, of pleasure and of arts, into a theatre of blood.

Having already shewn, that the principles of infidelity facilitate the commission of crimes by removing the restraints of fear, and that they foster the arrogance of the individual, while they inculcate the most despicable opinion of the species, the inevitable result is, that a haughty self confidence, a contempt of mankind, together with a daring defiance of religious restraints ; are the natural ingredients of the atheistical character ; nor is it less evident that these are, of all others, the dispositions which most forcibly stimulate to violence and cruelty.

Settle it therefore in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that atheism is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious system, equally hostile to every useful restraint, and to every virtuous affection ; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor around us to awaken tenderness ; it wages

war with heaven and earth; its first object is to dethrone God, its next to destroy man.\*

There is a third vice not less destructive than either of those which have been already mentioned, to which the system of modern infidelity is favorable; that is, unbridled sensuality, the licentious and unrestrained indulgence of those passions which are essential to the continuation of the species. The magnitude of those passions, and their supreme importance to the existence as well as the peace and welfare of society, have rendered it one of the chief objects of solicitude with every wise legislature, to restrain them by such laws, and to confine their indulgence within such limits, as shall best promote the great ends for which they were implanted.

The benevolence and wisdom of the Author of christianity are eminently conspicuous in the laws he has enacted on this branch of morals; for, while he authorises marriage, he restrains the vagrancy and caprice of the passions, by forbidding polygamy and divorce; and, well knowing that offences against the laws of chastity usually spring from an ill regulated imagination, he inculcates purity of heart. Among innumerable benefits which the world has derived from the christian religion, a superior refinement in the sexual sentiments, a more equal and respectful treatment of women, greater dignity and permanence conferred on the institution of marriage, are not the least considerable: in consequence of which the purest affections, and the most sacred duties, are grafted on the stock of the strongest instincts.

The aim of all the leading champions of infidelity is, to rob mankind of these benefits, and throw them back into a

\* As human nature is the same in all ages, it is not surprising to find the same moral systems, even in the most dissimilar circumstances, produce corresponding effects. *Josephus* remarks that the Sadducees, a kind of Jewish infidels, whose tenets were the denial of a moral government and a future state, were distinguished from the other sects by their ferocity. *De Bell. Jud. lib. 2.* He elsewhere remarks, that they were eminent for their intemperance in their judicial capacity.



state of gross and brutal sensuality. Mr. *Hume* represents the private conduct of the profligate *Charles*, whose debaucheries polluted the age, as a just subject of panegyric. A disciple in the same school has lately had the unblushing effrontery to stigmatize marriage as the worst of all monopolies ; and, in a narrative of his licentious amors, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by submitting to its restraint. The popular productions on the continent, which issue from the atheistical school, are incessantly directed to the same purpose.

Under every possible aspect in which infidelity can be viewed, it extends the dominion of sensuality : it repeals and abrogates every law by which divine revelation has, under such awful sanctions, restrained the indulgence of the passions : the disbelief of a supreme omniscient Being which it inculcates, releases its disciples from an attention to the *heart*, from every care but that of outward decorum ; and the exclusion of the devout affections and an unseen world, leaves the mind immersed in visible, sensible objects.

There are two sorts of pleasures, corporeal and mental : Though we are indebted to the senses for all our perceptions *originally*, yet those, which are at the farthest remove from their *immediate impressions*, confer the most elevation on the character, since, in proportion as they are multiplied and augmented, the slavish subjection to the senses is subdued. Hence the true and only antidote to debasing sensuality is, the possession of a fund of that *kind of enjoyment* which is independent of the corporeal appetites. Inferior in the perfection of several of his senses to different parts of the brute creation, the superiority of man over them all consists in his superior power of multiplying, by new combinations, his mental perceptions, and thereby of creating to himself resources of happiness, separate from external sensation. In the scale of enjoyment, the first remove from sense are the pleasures of

reason and society ; the next are the pleasures of devotion and religion. The former, though totally distinct from those of sense, are yet less perfectly adapted to moderate their excesses than the last ; as they are in a great measure conversant with visible and sensible objects. The religious sentiments and affections are, in fact, and were intended to be, the *proper antagonist* of sensuality, the great deliverer from the thralldom of the appetites ; by opening a spiritual world, and inspiring hopes, and fears, and consolations, and joys, which bear no relation to the material and invisible universe. The criminal indulgence of sensual passions admits but of two modes of prevention ; the establishment of such laws and maxims in society as shall render lewd profligacy impracticable or infamous ; or, the infusion of such principles and habits as shall render it distasteful : human legislatures have encountered the disease in the first, the truths and sanctions of revealed religion, in the last of these methods : to both of which the advocates of modern infidelity are equally hostile.

So much has been said by many able writers to evince the inconceivable benefit of the marriage institution, that to hear it seriously attacked by men who stile themselves philosophers, at the close of the eighteenth century, must awaken indignation and surprize. The object of this discourse leads us to direct our attention particularly to the influence of this institution, on the *civilization* of the world.

From the records of revelation we learn, that marriage, or the *permanent union* of the sexes, was ordained by God, and existed under different modifications in the early infancy of mankind, without which they could never have emerged from barbarism. For, conceive only what eternal discord, jealousy and violence would ensue, were the objects of the tenderest affections secured to their possessor by no law or tie of moral obligation ; were domestic enjoyments disturbed by incessant fear, and licentiousness inflamed by hope. Who could find

sufficient tranquillity of mind, to enable him to plan or execute any continued scheme of action, or what room for arts, or sciences, or religion, or virtue, in that state in which the chief earthly happiness was exposed to every lawless invader ; where one was racked with an incessant anxiety to keep what the other was equally eager to acquire ? It is not probable in itself, independent of the light of scripture, that the benevolent Author of the human race ever placed them in so wretched a condition at first ; it is certain they could not remain in it long without being exterminated. Marriage, by shutting out these evils, and enabling every man to rest secure in his enjoyments, is the great civilizer of the world ; with this security the mind is at liberty to expand in generous affections, has leisure to look abroad, and engage in the pursuits of knowledge, science, and virtue.

Nor is it in this way only that marriage institutions are essential to the welfare of mankind. They are sources of tenderness, as well as the guardians of peace. Without the permanent union of the sexes, there can be no permanent families : the dissolution of nuptial ties involves the dissolution of domestic society. But domestic society is the seminary of social affections, the cradle of sensibility, where the first elements are acquired of that tenderness and humanity, which cement mankind together, and which, were they entirely extinguished, the whole fabric of social institutions would be dissolved.

Families are so many centres of attraction, which preserve mankind from being scattered and dissipated by the repulsive powers of selfishness. The order of nature is, evermore, from particulars to generals. As, in the operations of intellect, we proceed from the contemplation of individuals to the formation of general abstractions, so in the development of the passions, in like manner, we advance from private to public affections, from the love of parents, brothers, and

listers, to those more expanded regards, which embrace the immense society of human kind.\*

In order to render men benevolent, they must first be made tender : for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reasoning ; they result from that culture of the heart, from those early impressions of tenderness, gratitude, and sympathy, which the endearments of domestic life are sure to supply, and for the formation of which it is the best possible school.

The advocates of infidelity invert this eternal order of nature. Instead of inculcating the private affections as a discipline by which the mind is prepared for those of a more public nature, they set them in direct opposition to each other ; they propose to build general benevolence on the destruction of individual tenderness, and to make us love the whole species more, by loving every particular part of it less. In pursuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other social disposition, are reprobated ; virtue is limited to a passionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to ask, when all the tenderness of life is extinguished, and all the bands of society are untwisted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to spring ?

When this savage philosophy has completed its work, when it has taught its disciple to look with perfect indifference on the offspring of his body and the wife of his bosom, to estrange himself from his friends, insult his benefactors, and silence the pleadings of gratitude and pity ; will he, by thus divesting himself of all that is human, be better prepared

\* *Arctior vero colligatio societatis propinquorum : ab illa enim immensa societate humani generis, in exiguum angustumque concluditur, nam cum sit hoc natura commune animantium ut habeant libidinem procreandi prima societas in ipso conjugio est, proxima in liberis, deinde una domus, communia omnia. Id autem est principium urbis, et quasi seminarium reipublicæ.*  
*Cic. de Off.*

for the disinterested love of his species? Will he become a philanthropist only because he has ceased to be a man? Rather, in this total exemption from all the feelings which humanize and soften, in this chilling frost of universal indifference, may we not be certain selfishness, unmingled and uncontrolled, will assume the empire of his heart; and that, under pretence of advancing the general good, an object to which the fancy may give innumerable shapes, he will be prepared for the violation of every duty, and the perpetration of every crime? Extended benevolence is the last and most perfect fruit of the private affections; so that to expect to reap the former from the extinction of the latter, is to oppose the means to the end; is as absurd as to attempt to reach the summit of the highest mountain, without passing through the intermediate spaces, or to hope to attain the heights of science by forgetting the first elements of knowledge. These absurdities have sprung, however, in the advocates of infidelity, from an ignorance of human nature, sufficient to disgrace even those who did not stile themselves philosophers. Presuming, contrary to the experience of every moment, that the affections are awakened by *reasoning*, and perceiving that the general good is an incomparably greater *object in itself*, than the happiness of any limited number of individuals, they inferred nothing more was necessary than to exhibit it in its just dimensions; to draw the *affections* towards it; as though the fact of the superior populousness of China to Great Britain, needed but to be known, to render us indifferent to our domestic concerns, and to lead us to direct all our anxiety, to the prosperity of that vast, but remote empire.

It is not the province of reason to awaken new passions, or open new sources of sensibility, but to direct us in the attainment of those objects which nature has already rendered pleasing, or to determine among the interfering inclinations and passions that sway the mind, which are the fittest to be preferred.

Is a regard to the general good then, you will reply, to be excluded from the motives of action? Nothing is more remote from my intention: but as the nature of this motive has, in my opinion, been much misunderstood by some good men, and abused by others of a different description, to the worst of purposes, permit me to declare, in a few words, what appears to me to be the truth on this subject.

The welfare of the whole system of being must be allowed to be, *in itself*, the object of all others the most worthy of being pursued; so that, could the mind distinctly embrace it, and discern at every step *what action* would infallibly promote it, we should be furnished with a sure criterion of right and wrong, an unerring guide which would supersede the use and necessity of all inferior rules, laws, and principles.

But this being impossible, since the good of the *whole* is a motive so loose and indeterminate, and embraces such an infinity of relations, that before we could be certain what action is prescribed, the season of action would be past; to weak, short sighted mortals, Providence has assigned a sphere of agency, less grand and extensive indeed, but better suited to their limited powers, by implanting certain *affections* which it is their duty to cultivate, and suggesting particular rules to which they are bound to conform. By these provisions, the boundaries of virtue are easily ascertained, at the same time that its ultimate object, the good of the whole, is secured; for, since the happiness of the entire system results from the happiness of the several parts, the affections which confine the attention *immediately* to the latter, conspire in the end to the promotion of the former; as the laborer whose industry is limited to the corner of a large building, performs his part towards rearing the structure, much more effectually than if he extended his care to the whole.

As the interest, however, of any limited number of persons may not only not contribute, but may possibly be directly op-

posed to the general good ; the interest of a family, for example, to that of a province, or, of a nation to that of the world ; Providence has so ordered it, that in a well regulated mind there springs up, as we have already seen, besides particular attachments, *an extended regard to the species*, whose office is twofold ; not to *destroy* and *extinguish* the more private affections, which is mental parricide ; but first, as far as is consistent with the claims of those who are immediately committed to our care, *to do good to all men* ; secondly, to exercise a jurisdiction and control over the private affections, so as to prohibit their indulgence, whenever it would be attended with *manifest detriment* to the whole. Thus every part of our nature is brought into action ; all the practical principles of the human heart find an element to move in, each in its different fort and manner, conspiring, without mutual collisions, to maintain the harmony of the world and the happiness of the universe.\*

\* It is somewhat singular, that many of the fashionable infidels have lit upon a definition of virtue, which perfectly coincides with that of certain metaphysical divines in America, first invented and defended by that most acute reasoner, *Jonathan Edwards*. They both place virtue, exclusively, in a passion for the general good, or, as Mr *Edwards* expresses it, *love to Being in general* ; so that our love is always to be proportioned to the magnitude of its object in the great scale of Being ; which is liable to the objections I have already stated as well as to many others, which the limits of this note will not permit me to enumerate. Let it suffice to remark, 1. That virtue on these principles is an utter impossibility ; for the system of Being comprehending the great Supreme, is *infinite*, and therefore to maintain the proper proportion, the force of particular attachment must be infinitely less than the passion for the general good ; but the limits of the human mind are not capable of any emotions so infinitely different *in degree*. 2. Since *our views* of the extent of the universe are capable of perpetual enlargement, admitting the sum of existence is ever the same, we must return back at each step to diminish the strength of particular affections, or they will become disproportionate, and consequently on these principles vicious ; so that the balance must be continually fluctuating, by the weights being taken out of one scale and put into the other. 3. If virtue consist *exclusively* in love to Being in general, or attachment to the general good, the particular affections are, to every purpose of virtue, useless, and even pernicious ; for their immediate, nay their necessary tendency is, to attract to their objects a proportion of attention, which far exceeds their comparative value in the general scale. To allege that the *general good* is promoted by them will be

Before I close this discourse, I cannot omit to mention three circumstances attending the propagation of infidelity, by its present abettors, equally new and alarming.

1. It is the first attempt which has been ever witnessed on an extensive scale, to establish *the principles of atheism*; the first effort which history has recorded to disannul and extinguish the belief of all superior powers; the consequence of which, should it succeed, will be to place mankind in a situation never before experienced, not during the ages of pagan darkness. The system of polytheism was as remote from modern infidelity as from true religion. Amidst that rubbish of superstition, the product of fear, ignorance and vice, which had been accumulating for ages, some faint embers of sacred truth remained unextinguished; the interposition of unseen powers in the affairs of men was believed and revered, the

of no advantage to the defence of this system, but the contrary, by confessing that a greater sum of happiness is attained by a deviation from, than an adherence to, its principles; unless its advocates mean by the love of Being in general, the same thing as the private affections, which is to confound all the distinctions of language, as well as all the operations of mind. Let it be remembered, we have no dispute what is the ultimate end of virtue, which is allowed on both sides to be the greatest sum of happiness in the universe: the question is merely, what is *virtue itself*? or, in other words, what are the means appointed for the attainment of that end.

There is little doubt from some part of Mr. Gougin's work, entitled "*Political Justice*," as well as from his early habits of reading, that he was indebted to Mr. Edwards for his principal arguments against the private affections; though with a daring confidence, he has pursued his principles to an extreme from which that most excellent man would have revolted with horror! The fundamental error of the whole system arose, as I conceive, from a mistaken pursuit of simplicity; from a wish to construct a moral system without leaving sufficient scope for the infinite variety of moral phenomena and mental combination, in consequence of which, its advocates were induced to place virtue *exclusively* in some *one disposition* of mind, and since the passion for the general good is undeniably the *noblest* and most extensive of all others, when it was once resolved to place virtue in any *one thing*, there remained little room to hesitate which should be preferred. It might have been worth while to reflect, that in the natural world there are two kinds of attraction; one, which holds the several *parts* of individual bodies in contact; another, which maintains the union of bodies themselves with the general system; and that though the union in the former case is much more *intimate* than in the latter, they are equally essential to the order of the world. Similar to this is the relation which the public and private affections bear to each other, and their use in the moral system.



sanctity of oaths was maintained, the idea of *revelation* and of *tradition* as a source of religious knowledge, was familiar, a useful persuasion of the existence of a future world was kept alive, and the greater gods were looked up to as the guardians of the public welfare, the patrons of those virtues which promote the prosperity of states, and the avengers of injustice, perfidy and fraud.\*

\* The testimony of *Polybius*, to the beneficial effects which resulted from the system of Pagan superstition, in fortifying the sentiments of moral obligation, and supporting the sanctity of oaths, is so weighty and decisive, that it would be an injustice to the subject not to insert it: more especially as it is impossible to attribute it to the influence of credulity on the author himself, who was, evidently, a sceptic. It is scarcely necessary to remark, that all the benefits which might in any way flow from superstition, are secured to an incomparably greater degree by the belief of true religion.

“But among all the useful institutions,” says *Polybius*, “that demonstrate the superior excellence of the Roman government, the most considerable, perhaps, is the opinion which the people are taught to hold concerning the gods; and that which other men regard as an object of disgrace, appears in my judgment to be the very thing by which this republic is chiefly sustained. I mean superstition; which is impressed, with all its terrors and influences, both on the private actions of the citizens and the public administration of the state, to a degree that can scarcely be exceeded.

“The ancients therefore acted not absurdly, nor without good reason, when they inculcated the notions concerning the gods, and the belief of infernal punishments; but much rather are those of the present age to be charged with rashness and absurdity in endeavoring to extirpate these opinions; for, not to mention other effects that flow from such an institution, if among the Greeks, for example, a single talent only be entrusted to those who have the management of any of the public money, though they give ten written sureties, with as many seals, and twice as many witnesses, they are unable to discharge the trust reposed in them with integrity. But the Romans, on the other hand, who in the course of their magistracies and in embassies disburse the greatest sums, are prevailed on, by the single obligation of an oath, to perform their duty with inviolable honesty. And as, in other states, a man is rarely to be found whose hands are pure from public robbery, so, amongst the Romans, it is no less rare to discover one that is tainted with this crime.”  
*Hampton's Polybius. Vol. 3, B. 6.*

Though the system of paganism is justly condemned by reason and scripture, yet it assumed as true several principles of the first importance to the preservation of public manners; such as a persuasion of invisible power, of the folly of incurring the divine vengeance for the attainment of any present advantage, and the divine approbation of virtue; so that, strictly speaking, it was the mixture of truth in it which gave it all its utility; which is well stated by the *great and judicious* HOOKER in treating on this subject. “Seeing, therefore, it doth thus appear,” says that venerable Author, “that the safety of all states dependeth upon religion; that religion unfeignedly loved perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous services in the commonwealth; that men's desire is, in general, to hold no religion but the true.

Of whatever benefit superstition might formerly be productive, by the scattered particles of truth which it contained, these advantages can now only be reaped from the foil of true religion; nor is there any other alternative left than the belief of christianity, or absolute atheism, in the revolution, of the human mind, exploded *opinions* are often revived, but an exploded superstition never recovers its credit. The pretension to divine Revelation is so august and commanding, that, when its falsehood is once discerned, it is covered with all the ignominy of detected imposture; it falls from such a height (to change the figure) that it is inevitably crumbled into atoms. Religions, whether false or true, are not creatures of arbitrary institution. After discrediting the principles of piety, should our modern free thinkers find it necessary, in order to restrain the excesses of ferocity, to seek for a substitute in some popular superstition, it will prove a vain and impracticable attempt: they may recal the names, restore the altars, and revive the ceremonies, but to rekindle the spirit of heathenism will exceed their power; because it is impossible to enact ignorance by law, or to repeal, by legislative authority, the dictates of reason, and the light of science.

2. The efforts of infidels, to diffuse the principles of infidelity among the common people, is another alarming symptom peculiar to the present time. *Hume*, *Bolingbroke*, and *Gibbon* addressed themselves solely to the more polished classes of the community, and would have thought their refined speculations debased by an attempt to enlist disciples from among the populace. Infidelity has lately grown condescending: bred in the speculations of a daring philosophy, immured at

and that whatever good effects do grow out of their religion, who embrace, instead of the true, a false, the roots thereof are certain sparks of the light of truth intermingled with the darkness of error, because no religion can wholly and only consist of untruths, we have reason to think that all true virtues are to honor *true religion* as their parent, and all well ordered common weals to love her as their chiefest stay." *Eccl's. Pol. B. 5.*

first in the cloisters of the learned, and afterwards nursed in the lap of voluptuousness and of courts ; having at length reached its full maturity, it boldly ventures to challenge the suffrages of the people, solicits the acquaintance of peasants and mechanics, and seeks to draw whole nations to its standard.

It is not difficult to account for this new state of things. While infidelity was rare, it was employed as the instrument of literary vanity ; its wide diffusion having disqualified it for answering that purpose, it is now adopted as the organ of political convulsion. Literary distinction is conferred by the approbation of a few ; but the total subversion and overthrow of society demands the concurrence of millions.

3. The infidels of the present day are the first sophists who have presumed to innovate in the very *substance* of morals. The disputes on moral questions hitherto agitated amongst philosophers have respected the *grounds* of duty, not the *nature of duty itself* ; or they have been merely metaphysical, and related to the *history* of moral sentiments in the mind, the sources and principles from which they were most easily deduced ; they never turned on the quality of those dispositions and actions which were to be denominated virtuous. In the firm persuasion that the love and fear of the supreme Being, the sacred observation of promises and oaths, reverence to magistrates, obedience to parents, gratitude to benefactors, conjugal fidelity, and parental tenderness, were primary virtues, and the chief support of every commonwealth, they were unanimous. The curse denounced upon such as remove ancient land marks, upon those who call good evil and evil good, put light for darkness, and darkness for light, who employ their faculties to subvert the eternal distinctions of right and wrong, and thus to poison the streams of virtue at their source, falls with accumulated weight on the advocates of modern infidelity, and on them alone.

Permit me to close this discourse with a few serious reflections. There is much, it must be confessed in the apostacy of multitudes, and the rapid progress of infidelity, to awaken our fears for the virtue of the rising generation ; but nothing to shake our faith, nothing which scripture itself does not give us room to expect. The features which compose the character of apostates, their prophaneness, presumption, lewdness, impatience of subordination, restless appetite for change, vain pretensions to freedom and to emancipate the world, while themselves are the slaves of lust, the weapons with which they attack christianity and the snares they spread for the unwary, are depicted in the clearest colors by the pencil of prophecy. *Knowing this first*, says PETER, *that there shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts.\** In the same epistle he more fully describes the persons he alludes to, *as chiefly them which walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government ; presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities ; sporting themselves in their own deceivings, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sins ; beguiling unstable souls ; For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error ; while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.†* Of the same characters JUDE admonishes us, *to remember that they were foretold as mockers, who should be in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they*, he adds, *who separate themselves (by apostacy) sensual, not having the spirit.* Infidelity is an evil of short duration. “ *It has,*” as a judicious writer observes, “ *no individual subsistence given it in the system of prophecy. It is not a BEAST, but a mere putrid excrescence of the papal beast ; an excrescence which, though it may diffuse death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet shall die along*

\* 2 Peter, iii. v. 3.

† 2 Peter, ii.

*with it.\** Its enormities will hasten its overthrow. It is impossible that a system, which, by vilifying every virtue, and embracing the patronage of almost every vice and crime, wages war with all the order and civilization of the world ; which, equal to the establishment of nothing, is armed only with the energies of destruction, can long retain an ascendancy. It is in no shape formed for perpetuity. Sudden in its rise, and impetuous in its progress, it resembles a mountain torrent, which is loud, filthy, and desolating ; but being fed by no perennial spring is soon drained off and disappears. By permitting, to a certain extent, the prevalence of infidelity, Providence is preparing new triumphs for religion. In asserting its authority, the preachers of the gospel have hitherto found it necessary to weigh the prospects of immortality against the interests of time, to strip the world of its charms, to insist on the deceitfulness of pleasure, the unsatisfying nature of riches, the emptiness of grandeur, and the nothingness of a mere worldly life. Topics of this nature will always have their use ; but it is not by such representations alone, that the importance of religion is evinced. The prevalence of impiety has armed us with new weapons in its defence.

Religion being primarily intended to make men *wise unto salvation*, the support it ministers to social order, the stability it confers on government and laws, is a *subordinate species* of advantage which we should have continued to enjoy without reflecting on its cause, but for the developement of deistical principles and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a neighboring country. It had been the constant boast of infidels, that their system, more liberal and generous than christianity, needed but to be tried to produce an immense accession to human happiness ; and christian nations, careless and supine, retaining little of religion but the pro-

\* See an excellent work, lately published by the Rev. *A. Fuller*, entitled *The Gospel its own Witness*. Sold by Mr. Bingham, and Messrs. Manning and Loring, Boston, and by S. Etheridge, Charlestown.

cession, and disgusted with its restraints, lent a favorable ear to these pretensions. God permitted the trial to be made: in one country, and that the centre of Christendom, revelation underwent a total eclipse,\* while atheism performing on a darkened theatre its strange and fearful tragedy confounded the first elements of society, blended every age, rank and sex, in indiscriminate proscription and massacre, and convulsed all Europe to its centre: that the imperishable memorial of these events might teach the last generations of mankind, to consider religion as the pillar of society, the safeguard of nations, the parent of social order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the passions, and secure to every one his rights; to the laborious the reward of their industry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preservation of their honors, and to princes the stability of their thrones.

We might ask the patrons of infidelity, what fury impels them to attempt the subversion of christianity? Is it that they have discovered a better system? To what virtues are their principles favorable, or is there one which christians have not carried to a higher perfection than any of whom their party can boast? Have they discovered a more excellent rule of life, or a better hope in death, than that which the scriptures suggest? Above all, what are the pretensions on which they rest their claims to be the guides of mankind; or which embolden them to expect that we should trample upon the experience of ages, and abandon a religion, which has been attested by a train of miracles and prophecies in which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble,

\* It is worthy of attention that *Morice* a warm advocate of the French Revolution, and a professed deist, in his recent work, entitled "*New Paris*," acknowledges and laments the extinction of religion in France. "We have," says he, "in proscribing superstition, destroyed all religious sentiment: but this is not the way to regenerate the world." See Appendix to the 30th Vol. MONTHLY REVIEW.

and consolation in the hour of death ; a religion which has been adorned with the highest sanctity of character and splendor of talents, which enrols amongst its disciples the names of BACON, NEWTON, and LOCKE, the glory of their species, and to which these illustrious men were proud to dedicate the last and best fruits of their immortal genius ?

If the question at issue is to be decided by argument, nothing can be added to the triumph of christianity ; if by an appeal to authority, what have our adversaries to oppose to these great names ? Where are the infidels of such pure, uncontaminated morals, unshaken probity, and extended benevolence, that we should be in danger of being seduced into impiety by their example ? Into what obscure recesses of misery, into what dungeons, have their philanthropists penetrated to lighten the fetters and relieve the sorrows of the helpless captive ? What barbarous tribes have their apostles visited, what distant climes have *they* explored, encompassed with cold, nakedness and want, to diffuse principles of virtue and the blessings of civilization ? Or will they rather chuse to wave their pretensions to this extraordinary, and in their eyes, eccentric species of benevolence (for infidels, we know, are sworn enemies to enthusiasm of every sort) and rest their character on their political exploits, on their efforts to reanimate the virtue of a sinking state, to restrain licentiousness, to calm the tumult of popular fury, and by inculcating the spirit of justice, moderation, and pity for fallen greatness, to mitigate the inevitable horrors of revolution ? Our adversaries will at least have the discretion, if not the modesty, to recede from this test.

More than all, their infatuated eagerness, their parricidal zeal to extinguish a sense of Deity, must excite astonishment and horror. Is the idea of an Almighty and perfect Ruler, unfriendly to any passion which is consistent with innocence, or an obstruction to any design which it is not shameful to

avow ? Eternal God ! on what are thine enemies intent : what are those enterprizes of guilt and horror, that, for the safety of their performers, require to be enveloped in a darkness which the eye of heaven must not pierce ! Miserable men ! proud of being the offspring of chance ; in love with universal disorder ; whose happiness is involved in the belief of there being no witnesses to their designs, and who are at ease only because they suppose themselves inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world !

Having been led by the nature of the subject to consider chiefly, the manner in which sceptical impiety affects the welfare of states, it is the more requisite to warn you against that most fatal mistake of regarding religion as an engine of policy ; and to recal to your recollection, that the concern we have in it, is much more as *individuals* than as *collective bodies*, and far less temporal than eternal. The happiness it confers in the present life are blessings which it scatters by the way in its march to immortality. That future condition of being which it ascertains, and for which its promises and truths are meant to prepare us, is the ultimate end of human societies, the final scope and object of present existence, in comparison of which, all the revolutions of nations, and all the vicissitudes of time, are light and transitory. *Godliness has, it is true, the promise of the life that now is, but chiefly of that which is to come.* Other acquisitions may be requisite to make men great ; but be assured, the religion of Jesus is alone sufficient to make them good and happy. Powerful sources of consolation in sorrow, unshaken fortitude amidst the changes and perturbations of the world, humility remote from meanness, and dignity unstained by pride, contentment in every station, passions pure and calm, with habitual serenity, the full enjoyment of life, undisturbed by the dread of dissolution, or the fear of an hereafter, are its invaluable gifts. To these enjoyments, however,



you will necessarily continue strangers, unless you resign yourselves wholly to its power ; for the consolations of religion are reserved to reward, to sweeten, and to stimulate obedience. Many without renouncing the profession of christianity, without formally rejecting its distinguishing doctrines, live in such an habitual violation of its laws, and contradiction to its spirit, that conscious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination, instead of tranquillizing their hearts, and hangs with depressing weight on all their enjoyments and pursuits. Their religion, instead of comforting them under their troubles, is itself their greatest trouble, from which they seek refuge in the dissipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conscience force them back upon religion. Thus suspended betwixt opposite powers, the sport of contradictory influences, they are disqualified for the happiness of both worlds, and neither enjoy the pleasures of sin, nor the peace of piety. Is it surprising to find a mind bewildered in uncertainty, and dissatisfied with itself, court deception, and embrace with eagerness every pretext to mutilate the claims and enervate the authority of christianity, forgetting that it is of the very essence of religious principle to preside and control, and that it is impossible to *serve God and mammon*. It is this class of professors, who are chiefly in danger of being entangled in the snares of infidelity.

The champions of infidelity have much more reason to be ashamed, than to boast, of such converts. For what can be a stronger presumption of the falsehood of a system, than that it is the opiate of a restless conscience ; that it prevails with minds of a certain description, not because they find it true, but because they feel it necessary ; and that, in adopting it, they consult less with their reason, than with their vices and

their fears? It requires but little sagacity to foresee that speculations which originate in guilt, must end in ruin. Infidels are not themselves satisfied with the truth of their system; for had they any settled assurance of its principles, in consequence of calm dispassionate investigation, they would never disturb the quiet of the world by their attempts to proselyte; but would lament their own infelicity in not being able to perceive sufficient evidence for the truth of a religion, which furnishes such incentives to virtue, and inspires such exalted hopes. Having nothing to substitute in the place of religion, it is absurd to suppose that, in opposition to the collective voice of every country, age, and time, proclaiming its necessity, solicitude for the welfare of mankind impels them to destroy it.

To very different motives must their conduct be imputed. More like conspirators than philosophers, in spite of the darkness with which they endeavor to surround themselves, some rays of unwelcome conviction will penetrate, some secret apprehensions that all is not right, will make themselves felt, which they find nothing so effectual to quell as an attempt to enlist fresh disciples, who, in exchange for new principles, impart confidence, and diminish fear. For the same reason it is seldom they attack christianity by argument: their favorite weapons are ridicule, obscenity and blasphemy; as the most miserable outcasts of society are, of all men, found most to delight in vulgar merriment and senseless riot.

JESUS CHRIST seems to have *his fan in his hand, and to be thoroughly purging his floor*; and nominal christians will probably be scattered like chaff. But has *real* christianity any thing to fear? Have not the degenerate manners, and corrupt lives of multitudes in the visible church, been, on the contrary, the principal occasion of scandal and offence? Infidelity, without intending it, is gradually removing the reproach; possessing

the property of attracting to itself the morbid humors which pervade the church, until the christian profession, on the one hand, is reduced to a sound and healthy state, and scepticism, on the other, exhibits nothing but a mass of putridity and disease.

In a view of the final issue of the contest, we should find little cause to lament the astonishing prevalence of infidelity, but for a solicitude for the rising generation ; to whom its principles are recommended by two motives, with young minds the most persuasive, the love of independence, and the love of pleasure. With respect to the first, we would earnestly entreat the young to remember, that by the unanimous consent of all ages, modesty, docility, and reverence to superior years, and to parents, above all, have been considered as their *appropriate virtues*, a guard assigned by the immutable laws of God and nature on the inexperience of youth ; and with respect to the second, that christianity prohibits no pleasures that are innocent, lays no restraints that are capricious ; but that the sobriety and purity which it enjoins, by strengthening the intellectual powers, and preserving the faculties of mind and body in undiminished vigor, lay *the surest* foundation of present peace and future eminence. At such a season as this, it becomes an urgent duty on parents, guardians and tutors, to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of those committed to their care ; to make it appear that a concern for their eternal welfare is their chief concern, and to imbue them early with that knowledge of the evidences of christianity, and that profound reverence for the scriptures, that with the blessing of God, (which with submission they may then expect) *may keep them from this hour of temptation that has come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.*

To an attentive observer of the signs of the times, it will appear one of the most extraordinary phenomena of this

eventful crisis, that amidst the ravages of atheism and infidelity, real religion is evidently on the increase. *The kingdom of God, we know, cometh not with observation* ; but still there are not wanting manifest tokens of its approach. The personal appearance of the Son of God was announced by the shaking of nations : his spiritual kingdom, in all probability, will be established in the midst of similar convulsions and disorders. The blasphemous impiety of the enemies of God, as well as the zealous efforts of his sincere worshippers, will doubtless be overruled to accomplish the purposes of his unerring providence : while, in inflicting the chastisements of offended Deity on corrupt communities and nations, infidelity marks its progress by devastation and ruin, by the prostration of thrones, and concussion of kingdoms ; thus appalling the inhabitants of the world, and compelling them to take refuge in the church of God, the true sanctuary ; the stream of divine knowledge unobserved is flowing in new channels, winding its course among humble vallies, refreshing thirsty deserts, and enriching, with far other and higher blessings than those of commerce, the most distant climes and nations, until, agreeably to the prediction of prophecy, the *knowledge of the Lord shall fill and cover the whole earth.*

Within the limits of this discourse, it would be impracticable to exhibit the evidences of Christianity, nor is it my design ; but there is one consideration resulting immediately from my text, which is entitled to great weight with all who believe in the one living and true God, as the sole object of worship. The Ephesians, in common with other Gentiles, are described in the text as being, previous to their conversion, *without God in the world* ; that is, without any just and solid acquaintance with his character, destitute of the knowledge of his will, the institutes of his worship, and the hopes of his favor ; to the truth of which representation whoever possesses the slightest acquaintance with pagan antiquity, must

assent ; nor is it a fact less incontestible, that, while human philosophy was never able to abolish idolatry in a single village, the promulgation of the gospel overthrew it in a great part (and that the most enlightened) of the world. If the unity and perfections of God, together with his moral government and exclusive right to the worship of mankind, are truths, they cannot reasonably be denied to be truths of the first importance, and infinitely to outweigh the greatest discoveries in science ; because they turn the hopes, fears and interests of man into a totally different channel from that in which they must otherwise flow. Wherever these principles are first admitted, there a new dominion is erected, and a new system of laws established.

But, since all events are under divine direction, is it reasonable to suppose, that the great Parent, after suffering his creatures to continue for ages ignorant of his true character, should, at length, in the course of his providence, fix upon falsehood, and that alone, as the effectual method of making himself known ; and that, what the virtuous exercise of reason in the best and wisest men was never permitted to accomplish, he should confer on fraud and delusion the honor of effecting ? It ill comports with the majesty of truth, or the character of God, to believe he has built the noblest superstructure on the weakest foundation, or reduced mankind to the miserable alternative, either of remaining destitute of the knowledge of himself, or of deriving it from the polluted source of impious imposture. We therefore feel ourselves justified, on this occasion, in adopting the triumphant boast of the great apostle : *Where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world ? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ? for after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

FINIS.

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